

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0926

June 24, 2020

Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dr. Scott Rivkees
Florida Surgeon General
Florida Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Mary Mayhew
Secretary
Agency for Health Care Administration
2727 Mahan Drive
Tallahassee, FL 32308

Dear Governor DeSantis, Surgeon General Rivkees, and Secretary Mayhew:

I write to you today to express my serious concern regarding the spread of COVID-19 in Miami-Dade County and the urgent need for action to prevent the situation from worsening. Since June began, daily confirmed cases in Dade County have increased at an alarming rate, with 83 new cases on June 1 skyrocketing to 957 confirmed today. And though testing has increased, the daily percentage of positives have also increased at a troubling rate, with an average of 13.68% over the last 14 days and a staggering 26.89% of tests confirmed positive today, far exceeding the World Health Organization's recommendation of 5% or lower.

Though the confirmed case numbers have been increasing since the month began, the last two weeks alone have seen the rate of hospitalizations increase as well, as confirmed by local reports. Miami's Jackson Health System has reported an 88% increase in COVID-19 patients in the past 14 days. And in my district, Baptist Health has reported that Homestead Hospital's intensive care unit is at capacity due in part to an increase in coronavirus cases. Although these hospitals have the capacity to transfer patients to other facilities in their health system, I spoke to administrators with the health system who have brought to my attention the greater concern of community spread. The vast majority of the recent cases are from a younger demographic that is medically vulnerable, and over 70% of the new cases reside in Homestead and Florida City. The administrators expressed their strong concern that many of these patients live in high-density housing where close contact with many others is unavoidable, and that the disease is spreading rapidly within these communities.

This is a situation that can grow exponentially if not addressed immediately. I have spoken with the mayors of Homestead and Florida City about this increase in community spread. They communicated with me the urgent need to immediately surge resources into the region to comprehensively test areas with high incidence of spread and to conduct thorough contact tracing to identify any potentially exposed cases. Furthermore, due to the congregate nature of

many of these patients' housing, we must find a way to comfortably isolate and quarantine those who are sick to prevent further transmissions.

We must act now and utilize the community mitigation tools we have at our disposal to prevent this situation from deteriorating further. I fear that should we fail to take the necessary actions now it will necessitate stronger and more restrictive measures in the future. We ask that you coordinate with local leaders and provide assistance with the following requests:

1. **Community Testing:** Testing resources must be surged into the area to ascertain who is sick and what the level of the spread is. These tests must be conducted directly in the community, to reach those who have difficulty accessing traditional drive-through or walk-up locations.
2. **Increased Contact Tracing:** We urge the Florida Department of Health to immediately coordinate with local leaders in Homestead to build up the contact tracing workforce needed to identify potentially infected people and mitigate the spread of these cases. We ask that the state send any readily trained contact tracers to the region immediately to conduct the necessary surveillance. We cannot lose time spending the next two weeks to train new tracers to respond – we must get aid to the area immediately.
3. **Quarantine and Isolation:** We ask that you work with Homestead's city leaders to identify hotels and other living facilities where positive or presumptive positive cases can isolate comfortably to prevent them from returning home to densely populated areas and spreading the disease further.
4. **Coordinated Multilingual Outreach:** I am greatly concerned that due to the state's difficulties with testing and the initial lack of clarity regarding eligibility for testing, many constituents are unclear who is eligible for testing. Significant outreach must be conducted to ensure that everyone in the community knows they are eligible and must be done in a culturally appropriate manner to reach non-English speakers.

The virus is spreading rapidly in our community, and we cannot afford to lose any more time and risk further exponential growth. I appreciate your prompt attention to this issue and stand ready to assist on the federal level.

Sincerely,



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress